

Comments Presented to Joint Committee Meeting Regarding MDOT 5-Year Plan, April 11, 2005



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Transportation Funding

Keep “Fix It First” as a Budget Priority

The 1990s was a decade of dire neglect for Michigan roads. Left behind is a legacy of potholes and snarled traffic. Beyond the personal impact, when we fail to maintain our road system, we squander one of our state’s most valuable assets. Without proper on-going maintenance, future repairs will be far more costly, and everything from the transport of goods to the quality of tourism is negatively affected.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is in the 3rd year of a 5-year “Fix-It-First” plan to restore our roads and bridges. Progress is being made. In the Detroit area, major portions of I-96 and I-94, which had become legendary for their potholes, are being repaired.

The Michigan legislature, especially the House leadership, thinks we can build our way out of sprawl and congestion. Rather than maintaining “Fix it First” as a budget priority or improving public transit, their proposed 5-year plan through 2009 emphasizes building and expanding roads in the outer suburbs which will fuel unwise growth in a state already plagued by some of the worst sprawl in the nation.

Message to Legislators about “Fix It First”: The state should not be squandering its limited transportation budget by building new roads, which fuel unsustainable growth and expensive sprawl. The “Fix-it-First” Plan should continue to be a budget priority, maximizing the effectiveness of Michigan’s existing transportation network.

Public Transit

While road quality deteriorated over the last decade, already deficient public transportation in Michigan has gone even further downhill. Detroit will soon drop 24-hour service on many routes and cancel other routes altogether. The suburban SMART system also faces threatened cutbacks.

Michigan needs a new commitment to efficient public transit. Good public transit can be an effective decongestant. Public transit reduces air pollution, saves energy and curbs global warming. It carries real health benefits for the entire state. Public transit enables people now cut off from jobs to get to work, helping businesses retain employees. Other benefits include reduced welfare payments and perhaps even reductions in crime. As shown in other cities, private investment follows investment in public transit.

When Michigan residents travel to cities in other states, they easily recognize that efficient public transit enhances the “coolness” and quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Good public transit systems are crucial for our state to join the 21st century.